Making of a Musical Play

A Strenuous Process, of Which the Stage Manager Bears the Burden

If any one believes that musical comedy is the synonym of a life of dalliance and ease such a believer should have stepped into the last rehearsal of "Mr. Wix of Wickham" before it went to be tried on the country canine, previous to its grand entrée into New York. In comparison with the strenuousness of this rehearsal the average strenuous life is as a limp stick of overdone spaghetti to an oak tree.

You breathed strenuosity as you came along Sixth avenue and heard a strange conglomeration of sounds, partly music and partly sulphur. The music belonged to the score, and it was real music. The rest didn't, but it was real, too.

Musical comedy is to be again the strong drawing card of the theatres this season. John Wagner, one of the collaborators of this particular comedy, says it is because people want to see pretty girls, and hear catchy music, and don't want to be troubled with the intricacies of Ibsenesque problems and Maeterlinckian meanderings. The theatre must be what dessert is to dinner; not too heavy nor too sweet nor too indigestible, but agreeably frothy.

All over the flight of stairs leading to the big room in Lyric Hall where "Mr. Wix" was rehearsing one stepped over chorus girls swapping summer vacation experiences. Possibly the nearness to the summer vacation may have accounted for the extra amount of vitality that went into the rehearsal; it possessed all the elements of vigorous muscles, fresh voices and unlimited enthusiasm, which would be hard to account for in any other way.

It was not technically a dress rehearsal; in another sense it was, for every kind and variety of costume was exhibited.

There was the girl in white piqué, with white shoes, a big lace hat covered with pink roses and a baby stare, which she turned on the frolicsome *Kangaroo*, known to his family and friends as Mr. Dave Abraham, at irregular intervals, whenever it became necessary for the *Kangaroo*, who also acts as ballet master, to remind her that it was necessary to move her feet as well as her eyes in the dance.

"NOT SLIM, BUT PREPOSSESSING."

There was the row of automobile girls who keep their own chauffeurs and still have money on a chorus girl's salary. They are known to the management as the musical comedy economists.

There was a young woman with a champagne pompadour which had shifted to leeward in the mêlée of the opening chorus, who wore champagne colored shoes, had her dress pinned firmly and high on either side with safety pins and her sleeves rolled up to the elbow. She had none of the hauteur which comes with the possession of chauffeurs. Her domicile might be a hall bedroom, but her ambition was limitless.

There was the little demure Miss, gowned in black, who looked at the director shyly with a lisp in her eye and a wink to her French accent. This was Mlle. Marie, as it turned out later.

There was the injured wife, fresh from the laundry. She was very much injured, as there was a great deal of her. Her net weight is more than 200 pounds, while her height would put the typical American girl, as represented on a magazine, to everlasting shame. She announced herself as "not slim, but prepossessing."

It is easy, even in the confusion that hypnotizes one's selective faculty at first, to pick out the leading lady. She walks about the room, when the stage manager allows her, as a Duke's daughter never does in real life, but always does in a musical comedy.

Ears and eyes soon become used to the confusion; lungs easily breathe the dust of shuffling feet, and then you discern in one corner a group of men dancing a sailor's hornpipe; you know they are sailors and that the dance is a hornpipe because every once in a while they pull hand over hand on an imaginary rope. Just in the same way you know that the four girls bent at right angles, wiggling their chignons and taking tiny steps very hurriedly are Chinese maidens. Just what sailors and Chinese maidens have to do with "Mr. Wix" does not trouble you at all. You know you are at a musical comedy, so anything may happen.

But elastic as are the limitations of musical comedy, there are certain stringent rules which may not be defied and are strictly adhered to in "Mr. Wix." The *Duke* always wears a heavy black cord to his eyeglasses and his buttonhole is adorned with an orchid. In the absence of the orchid at rehearsal he wears a china aster and so announces his identity, if there should be any question about it.

The course of true love does not run smooth. Old love has its bank account and its way of adjusting difficulties, but young love must have implacable papas or guardians. There must be runaways and heart wrecking experiences. There must be bloodshed or threatening of the same. Incognitos and complications must ensue—and you must know just as soon as you look at Young Love that it is all coming right. You mustn't be kept one moment on the rack, or you might just as well be at an Ibsen drama. You must not be obliged to hold your head between your hands in the interval between Acts I. and II. and say, "Did She Fall or Was She Pushed?" You must know as soon as you see *Lady Betty* and *Mr. Tom* that the marriage bells are in tune and only waiting for their cue. And to do the collaborators of "Mr. Wix" justice, they have adhered strictly to the rules.

In fact, the only person who did worry

THE FRENCH PART WITH A DASH OF GINGER.

at this rehearsal was the stage manager. If there ever was an overworked and underrated individual it is the stage manager of a musical comedy. There must be a special golden coronet waiting for him hereafter, for he certainly doesn't get his due here.

Touching stories are told occasionally of the badly treated chorus girl, the pale and anæmic victim of a brutal stage manager who lacerates her fine feelings with his coarse and ribald jests, who has no mercy on her weakness or charity for her sensitive spirit. If Mr. Ricketts, stage manager of "Mr. Wix," is the type of stage managers who take charge of musical comedies, then to the timber line with all pity for the pompadoured and pampered maiden of the chorus.

These chorus girls looked as if they had three meals a day and feared no hold-ups of salary receipts. The stage manager alone was worn to a shadow, had a hoarse voice and the general air of working overtime. Through the din of amatory confidences, the beating of time and the humming of some of the catchy airs, you heard his raucous accents:

"Never yet was the time and the place together. *Never yet!*"

He probably wasn't thinking of Browning's poem at it sounded remarkably like plagiarism.

"Do you say 'the shock has unnerved me' as if you were asking for cream on your oatmeal at breakfast? Do you? *Do you?* Well, if you don't, try it again and say 'the shock has unnerved me' as if it really had."

By this time the shock really has and the victim responds to that effect.

"Ladies! Are you at a visiting party or at a rehearsal? If you are not at a rehearsal, you might as well sit down and go home."

Just how this was to be accomplished at one and the same time the stage manager was too agitated to explain.

And again: "When you see me slapped in the face, laugh—this way."

That was easy and the cue being given

THE LEAPING KANGAROO.

"THIS IS NOT A VISITING PARTY; IT'S A REHEARSAL!"

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One of the trio of comedians engages his attention.

"Why don't you put some tang into it, man? You might as well be playing *Hamlet*."

The comedian, who has been kept busy making entrances with his companions through the barriers of chairs and chorus girls, speaks with a hoarse voice that can only be heard about a foot away:

"Can't speak. Been to rehearsals twice a day for two weeks. I've got to go to bed and rest."

"Well, go to bed."

Then the stage manager takes the score, and recites in a dirge-like voice the lines of some one who has not yet appeared at rehearsal

"White gloves? You said white gloves? I suppose you want white gloves. We are all out of white gloves."

He interrupts himself to say:

"Sh! Sh! Sh! Go out upper right—upper right. Oh, why are you so dense?"

Then he wipes the perspiration from his brow, sinks down as if he never would have strength to rise again, and announces to one of the musical collaborateurs who is sitting by with a straw in his mouth to show which way the wind of popular favor is going to blow:

"Let anybody that thinks it's easy to manage a musical comedy try his hand at it once—just once."

The collaborateur announces that he, personally, has no time, but when the piece is doing a hundred night circuit right here in New York——

"Yes," says the stage manager, pessimistically, "that's the time the stage manager's forgotten."

One of the pompadoured stars trips over to another of the composers and asks for her song, which comes next.

The composer in question is a newspaper man with the tenets of his craft. He can write only when his time is all up, the boy waiting for copy and the presses hot.

"But, my dear girl, the piece don't open until Monday, and it's Saturday night. Why, of course, the songs will be ready on time. Don't you worry."

She goes back tearfully, while the composer explains to his neighbor:

"Never heard of such a thing. Expect to have the songs ready beforehand? Why, you can't turn songs out that way. What are they thinking of?"

While the neighbor is pondering over this, the chorus, refreshed by a series of tête-à-têtes, dives suddenly for the middle of the room. Again, dust, confusion, waving arms and shuffling feet. From the confusion rises the refrain:

And when I come back home from travelling abroad,
You bet your boots I'll have a handle to my name.

And the chorus lifts imaginary monocles to real eyes and walks with the exaggerated swagger which has come to be linked in the public eye with the titled Englishman—in musical comedy. The iron bound rules of that form of entertainment are safe for the time.

Then come other songs and choruses, which will be responsible, if "Mr. Wix" proves a success: "Her First Can-Can," "The New York Way," "Angling by a Babbling Brook," "Military Maids" and "Bluff" sung even at the rehearsal with an abandon and vitality which if adhered to will put new life into the gallery critic.

Through song and chorus is heard the warning cry of the stage manager, who is apparently determined to be pleased with nothing:

"Step Lively! Keep on going! Put some ginger into that French song. Remember this isn't a funeral procession."

And over and over, untiring—"active," unabashed by criticism, the chorus girls and men repeat and repeat and repeat, as if they knew not weariness. Apparently in the bright lexicon beyond the footlights there is no such word as fail.

At 11 o'clock the chorus girl gives a long wild whoop. Rehearsal is over; but tired? Not a bit.

One is heard saying to another.

"Just as soon go all over it again."

The enthusiasm is a fathomless fund. But if any one thinks musical comedy an easy road to success try to write one, sing in it or even attend its rehearsal.

THE LOVE SONG WITHOUT WORDS.

KERN AT THE PIANO.

LAST CHANCE TO SEE SATURN'S RINGS.

Amid the turmoil of domestic politics and foreign war it is well to keep an eye on the stellar universe. After the familiar example of the mariner taking his bearings we shall thus be able to see where we are in the great tide of cosmical affairs, and it may do us no harm to find that after all, our little agitations have only stirred up the local dust.

The astronomers keeping their gaze on far off things may not represent the popular idea of good citizenship, but they are at heart quite as patriotic as the average man, and their studies of stars and planets afford valuable lessons for home application.

It is well worth anybody's while to take a glance at the sky through the haze of these September evenings. There are two or three things of unusual interest to be seen there. In the first place there is the planet Saturn paying us a visit again.

You may see him shining very conspicuously in the south between 9 and 10 o'clock. If you have a telescope with which to look at him there is an optical feast for you. His rings never appear more beautiful than at their present inclination, for year by year they are slowly closing up, i. e., getting edgewise to the earth, and just now their plane is inclined about 15 degrees to our line of sight, so that they appear in the form of a narrow oval with the ball of the enclosed planet projecting on either side of them.

It is strange sight—that huge world haloed like the head of a saint with a golden circlet, especially when we remember that that circlet is almost 170,000 miles across and is maintained in position by virtue of motion manyfold more rapid than that of the swiftest cannon ball.

It behooves any one who may desire to see Saturn in his most attractive aspect not to lose the present opportunity. As has been said, the rings are closing up. Next year when the planet again comes into a favorable position their oval will be distinctly narrower than it is now, and by 1907 they will be entirely closed, or edgewise, so that only a few powerful telescopes will be able to show them in the form of a slender luminous line.

After that they will begin to open again, gradually disclosing their southern sides. At present it is the northern surface of the rings that catches the sunlight and is visible to us.

It is worth remarking that the new ninth satellite of Saturn, named Phoebe, was seen for the first time by human eyes at the Yerkes observatory on the night of Aug. 8. It required the utmost powers of the greatest telescope in the world to reveal it, the observers being Prof. E. E. Barnard and Prof. H. H. Turner, the latter a visitor from England. Heretofore Phoebe has been known only through its faint image on photographic plates.

But a greater planet than Saturn is now also on exhibition—Jupiter. About 9 o'clock you will see him in the east, and there is nothing there or, at present, elsewhere in the sky able to rival him.

His unmatched splendor identifies him. Viewed simply with the naked eye he is a formidable sight. A short time ago the writer saw him rise above the blaze of the electric illumination at the world's exposition in St. Louis, and he was like a king at the spectacle.

Over the roof of the great white buildings, their cornices and pinnacles aflame with a million lights, he soared serene, supereminent, irresistible, drawing the eye after him. It was a greater world glancing down upon the concentrated display of the highest achievements of his lesser sister.

To speak of the telescopic attractions of Jupiter would be to open too long a chapter. Great things are going on upon his broad surface; true world-shaking, and perhaps world-making events. It is a scene of tremendous activities, a marvellous display of changing shapes and colors, the interpretation of which remains to be found.

Nor are Saturn and Jupiter the sum of the planetary wonders now illuminating the heavens. Low in the sunset the watchful eye may catch the gleam of Venus. But her reign is yet to come; she is still too near the god of day to escape the contrast of his overpowering brilliance.

Every evening, however, she gets a little further from him, and by the time the November frosts have begun to bite the last leaves from the trees, and when the bonfires of the victors in the Presidential election are reddening the night, she will have assumed her throne, the undeniable queen, in whose presence even Jupiter himself will sink to a lower rank, while all the stars salute her.

THE RUSSIAN ARMY'S THIRST.

A young man who was formerly a resident of Newark and is now engaged in going about the world taking cinematograph pictures, returned to Paris recently after a long stay with the Russian forces in Manchuria. He relates some of his experiences in a letter to a friend in Newark. He says the Russian soldier drinks altogether too much vodka.

"You are right," he writes; "I have seen sights which will never fade from my memory, but do not envy me, because I have bought my experience dearly. I fear I shall regret it as long as I live, for I have returned a wreck as far as health is concerned, having put up with privation and worry among a crowd worse than savages. Unfortunately I cannot make public all my experiences in the Far East, nor tell all I know of how the Russians fare, because we are doing a big business with Russia and should I offend them I could not sell my goods there.

"I am not a temperance man myself, but a fine sermon could be preached by one using the Russians as an example of what drink will do. As a matter of fact, as far as the Russian Army is concerned, it seems more like a 'boozing' expedition than a war. From morning to night you see them at it, drinking infernal vodka or alcohol, out of salad bowls, teacups and all manner of receptacles.

"I have been as far as Newchwang, which the Russians at that time thought would never fall into the hands of the Japs. They had two divisions placed at this point, but the soldiers were so busy with the alcohol that they found no time to find out what the Japs were doing, until one day they awoke, too late, as you know from the newspaper accounts of doings here.

"Travel on Baikal Lake for five days in pursuit of pictures, during a temperature varying from 25 to 45 degrees below zero, is not warm work. Still less did I enjoy my stay in prison as a suspicious individual.

"Being in the drug business it may interest you to hear that I have seen five sacks which were supposed to contain quinine opened and found to contain nothing more valuable than common salt. These arrived at the Red Cross Hospital at Harbin. Evidently some one had pocketed the difference in price."

A DOLL'S CAMP IN THE ADIRONDACKS.

"All sorts of luxuries are provided nowadays for dolls, as you know, I suppose, children, better than I do," said Uncle Hiram, "but let me tell you of something that Philip and I saw this summer in the Adirondacks that was, maybe, different from anything you ever did see.

"We were paddling along one day in a canoe along the shores of a beautiful quiet lake there, surrounded by mountains all covered with trees that came right down to the water's edge, when we saw ahead standing in the woods in a level spot, a very pleasant and comfortable looking house, two stories high, built of logs with the bark on, so that outside this house matched in well with the trees all around it and looked as natural as could be. It had a nice veranda all around it, and it certainly did look like a very pleasant place to live in.

"And then right down at the water's edge, a little to one side from the front of this house, the people that lived there had their boathouse, also built of logs and two stories high, with sleeping rooms upstairs and the whole downstairs all open for their boats.

"They had a float out in front in the lake for them to land at, and they could just pull their guide boats and canoes out of the water on this float, and then right up into the boathouse, where they kept them when they were not in use.

"And Philip and I thought that was a nice camp—you know they call many such places camps in the Adirondacks—and we were keeping our eyes on it as we paddled along, when all of a sudden we caught sight of the dolls' camp that I was going to tell you about, right at the edge of the water.

"This dolls' camp, which no doubt belonged to the children that lived in the house just back in the woods, was all complete, but it was just a little different from the big camp because instead of having a living house and then a boat house, it had a living house and an open camp; and the house stood close to the water, because they used that for a boat house as well as for a living house. I'll tell you about that house first.

"It was a very comfortable dolls' house, and it had in it everything that any doll could want, or at least everything that any doll could need for comfort in the woods. It had a nice bed, and in one corner a dressing table with dolls' combs and brushes and things, and then it had some chairs and a couch.

"And then it had a stove, with all sorts of cooking utensils, and there was another table, which I suppose must have been their dining table. There was a lamp on this table, but the dolls didn't have it lighted when we saw it, I suppose because this was in the daytime.

"This dolls' house had only one big room in it, and you remember I told you they used it for a boat house, too; and when we saw it there were two dolls' canoes resting on the floor, near the front of the house, lying there just as they had been left when they were drawn out of the water.

"There were two dolls in the house that day, one of them lying down on the couch I told you about, and the other in a dolls' hammock that was strung up across one corner of the house, and both of them, as far as we could see, fast asleep. I suppose they had been out paddling in those two canoes we saw on the floor, and got tired and were lying down now to take a little rest. And now I'll tell you about the open camp.

"You know they build various sorts of open camps in the woods, a common kind being one made with sides and back built of logs, and having a sloping roof, higher at the front than the back, and all open in front. They build a fire there when it's cold to keep the people in the camp warm and they cover the ground inside of this camp, or log shelter, all over with balsam boughs for the people staying in it to sleep on. A common size for such a camp would be one big enough for three or four people to sleep in.

"Well, right near the dolls' house was the dolls' open camp, built in every way just like the open camps for big folks, log sides and back, only made of little logs, you know, and covered on the top just the same, and with the ground inside all covered over thickly with balsam boughs just the same, and this camp big enough for three or four dolls, and there were two dolls in there asleep, as we passed by. Been out in the canoes with the dolls in the house, I suppose.

"Pretty nice sort of a camp, that dolls' camp, wasn't it?" said Uncle Hiram as he finished telling about it and looking smilingly around upon the circle of children.

And they all agreed that it was.

NICKEL NOVEL PIRATES.

Popular Literature Raided to Supply Them With Plots.

"The modern dime novel, or, rather, the nickel novel," said an author, "has descended into a system of plagiarism. No longer does the penny-a-liner depend on a vivid imagination for his effects.

"The old time writers of sensational novels, like 'Gene Sawyer, who created the original Nick Carter, did splendid feats with the imagination. It took a vivid pipe dreamer to think up a new wild tale every week. The degenerate brood of modern days doesn't overwork the imagination—only the good right hand.

"I learned this first when I was in college. I picked up one day a dime novel which ran on a series like 'Old Nick Carter' chronicling weekly the adventures of an impossible hero. In that special novel they had the hero doing athletic stunts in Yale.

"I hadn't read three pages before I recognized it as a rehash of 'Harry's Career in Yale,' which I had just read. The dime novel—or, rather, nickel novel—writer had taken the plot of 'Harry's Career,' cut out the love passages, touched up the high lights, put in a villain, and hashed it all up in fervid language and short paragraphs. In some places he'd swiped the language bodily.

"I bought that series every week for some time. Right straight through it was a rehash of the college stories which were so popular about that time.

"I was graduated soon after, and like most college graduates of literary ambitions, I published a book of college stories. In a few weeks, I had the satisfaction of seeing my plots rehashed in this series.

"Then I began to investigate detective stories, and I realized at once what a boon to the Grub street novelist Sherlock Holmes had been.

"You remember that in one of Doyle's tales Sherlock Holmes finds a tunnel under a street by driving a heavy truck over it. There it was, worked over on the third page.

"The next nickel novel I tackled had worked over 'The Red Headed League.' And so on, clear down the line.

"Anna Katherine Green has been swiped extensively for this purpose. Lately they have been running strong on the old French detective stories. I found that one nickel novelist, more painstaking than the rest, had patched up a number from parts of Conan Doyle, Anna Katherine Green and Gaboriau.

"The increasing literary demands of the country have brought all this about, I suppose. The taste for good reading has grown amazingly, but the hunger for the cheap sensational novel has grown also. There isn't enough imagination to go around, so the publishers of cheap stuff have had to devise a come-easy scheme.

"I once asked a publisher whose wares have been widely stolen in this manner why he didn't sue for infringement of copyright. He said that this stealing doesn't do any real harm.

"The messenger boys and bootblacks who buy nickel novels never heard of Sherlock Holmes, and would never think of buying a book costing more than five cents. The only real advantage of a copyright suit would be advertising, and he didn't think that advertising of that kind would pay him."

Rattlesnake Seminoles' Messenger.

Muskogee correspondence Kansas City Journal.

Great consternation was created among the members of the Seminole council at Wewoka yesterday, when a large rattlesnake glided into the tent where the assemblage was being addressed by the attorney of the nation, Capt. A. J. McKennon. Capt. McKennon was about to kill the snake, when one of the councilmen stopped him, explaining in broken English: "Him rattlesnake; he come to Seminole council; no other snake do that. He sent by Great Spirit. He go South; that mean Mexico. We must all go Mexico soon."

The captain was told that the rattlesnake had long been a messenger to the Seminole tribe from the Great Spirit. They told him that just before their fight with Jackson in the South, many moons ago, a great rattlesnake crawled from the bank of a lake and came into camp. The medicine men assembled and told the members of the tribe that great trouble was about to come upon them. They would have a great fight, and, as the snake went west, a part of the tribe would be driven West. They said that the rattlesnake had been looked upon as a messenger ever since.

Chinese Rebels Led by American M. D.

From the Atlanta Constitution.

Letters received in Atlanta from Roy S. Anderson, son of Dr. David L. Anderson, the well known Methodist missionary to China, who now holds the chair of English in Soochow University, Soochow, China, states that great uneasiness is felt over the recent Boxer disturbances in the Province of Kwangsi, where the rebels are being led by Sun Yun, a Chinaman who was educated in America, holding an M. D. degree from an American university.

Mr. Anderson writes:

"We are all in a stir out here in the Orient over the war and the recent disturbances in the Province of Kwangsi. The Chinese in that province have rebelled against the Government troops, and the Government troops have surrendered right along voluntarily—so it goes in China. Here is a Chinese proverb: 'I am a soldier when I am a soldier and I am a robber when I am not a soldier.' This is the literal translation which, of course, seems crude, yet you can tell what I am driving at.

"The rebels are being led by Sun Yun, a returned student from the United States. He received the degree of M. D. while in the States. He was called to Kwangsi about three weeks ago, and the rebels elected him their leader by a unanimous vote. I really don't know what the outcome of it will be, but it seems now to be affecting a good many parts of China that seem to be 'raw.'"